Documentation Center of Cambodia Forensic Project

An ambitious project was launched in 2001 in the lead up to the beginning of trials at the ECCC. With funding from several US agencies and the authorization of Prime Minister Hun Sen, a team of Cambodian and international researchers and experts undertook took a three-phase approach. The authors were the forensic experts on the team. In Phase 1, a feasibility study was performed and included visits to three sites (Choeung Ek, Ampe Phnom, and Phnom Udong). At the end of this phase, one member also undertook a study on the state of forensic pathology in Cambodia. Phase 2 had two objectives: to identify grave sites that were undisturbed by either removal of bones by locals for memorial construction and/or for looting purposes and to select a number of skulls exhibiting the typical types of trauma seen as a result of the execution methods used by the Khmer Rouge. These were to be exhibited at the Tuol Sleng museum . During this phase, the remains at Wat Sauphy (Wat Ka Koh) were examined. Phase 3 was to be a scientific excavation of an undisturbed mass grave. To date, not one of the mass graves in Cambodia has been scientifically excavated, and the importance of doing this is discussed below. It is unfortunate that funding was not forthcoming for this phase of the

project, and it was never undertaken. The work included documentary assessments in which the forensic experts reviewed the information on every mass grave documented by the grave mapping project. The experts then visited the sites that seemed like possible candidates based upon a potential lack of disturbance of the graves and the location (i.e., not in rice paddies, deep wells, or other areas which were then under water, and in areas which were secure from conflict as well as accessible) in order to "ground truth" the sites, get an up date on the condition of the sites since first mapped, and undertake interviews of people living in the areas who may be able to provide information relevant to undertaking excavations of an undisturbed site. Varied levels of examinations were undertaken at some of the memorial stupas on the remains themselves in order to understand what could be forensically gleaned from remains that had already been dug up, and to choose possible examples for the forensic exhibit. Ampe Phnom This stupa was estimated to contain the remains of at least 1000 individuals based on the number of skulls that could be counted. Unlike many of the other stupas investigated, this one contained many long bones as well. Individuals of all ages and both sexes were rep resented. The ground and riverbanks near the memorial contained exposed skeletal remains, which were easily

noticed. This was not the only site visited where human remains and clothing were read ily visible on the surface in areas where the graves had been disturbed to build stupas. One hundred skulls were randomly chosen from the stupa for examination, and one skull exhibited an in cised wound on the right supra orbital ridge. The long bones of the stupa were surveyed and 13 examples of sharp force trauma were identified. Phnom Udong This stupa contains several hundred skull portions and long bones. The skulls are largely calvarial fragments lacking the base and facial bones. All of the skull portions and a sample of long bones were assessed. Eight femora showed sharp force trauma, although the pres ervation of the remains in some of these cases made it difficult to distinguish between pre and postmortem trauma, as there was much postmortem taphonomic damage to the remains. Two of the skulls exhibited gunshot entrance wounds to the right parietal area. The entire contents of the stupa, which consisted of 104 skulls and a few long bones, were removed and analyzed for demographics (age and sex) and trauma. Some examples of blunt impact and penetrating trauma were seen. Stung Tauch Although there is no memorial stupa in Stung Tauch village, this is actually a good thing. Interviews with survivors and witnesses by the mass grave mapping project and by the authors strongly suggest

that there are unrobbed/undisturbed mass graves in the area. During Phase 2 of the DC-Cam forensic project, this village was determined to potentially be the most likely to produce primary forensic evidence in the country.

The Cambodian Conservation Project – Other Sites

Wat Kraing Ta Chann The team found 1904 skulls and 3158 other bones in the stupa. These were removed, cleaned, catalogued, and conserved according to the methodology utilized at Choeung Ek. Mr. Vuthy testified that there were six graves unexcavated in the area. The conservation project also analyzed remains from Prasat Padei and Kok Prech; however, there is no in formation available on the results of those efforts.